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Street vendors of Urban Bihar: A case study of Patna Municipal Corporation Area, Bihar

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Abstract : *Liberalization of Indian economy has opened up a whole world of Corporate Sector and easy access to wide variety of consumer goods for people at large. Even then, opportunities in formal sector are limited and a large number of unemployed youths in urban areas are totally dependent on informal economic activities. Among them, self employed and micro entrepreneurs in the city like street vendors and hawkers are very common and constitute a large section of the informal economy. Approximately, 2.5% of India's total population's sole source of existence is through street*

vending. They are mainly those who are unable to get regular jobs or are retrenched from existing jobs and try to solve their problems by their own meager resources. With increasing urbanization, the number of street vendors of Patna have increased manifold too. According to a study done by Nidan, there are around 80,000 vendors and hawkers in Patna. The present study is based on the primary survey of 50 street vendors and 50 customers of three areas of Patna M.C. to throw light on socio-economic conditions of street vendors of Patna, their utilities and nuisance created by them. From the study, it was found that with low educational attainment, meager income and poor living conditions their quality of life is not at all satisfactory. Apart from serving the urban residents with cheap and fresh vegetables and other commodities they save money, time and physical harassment of customers by providing accessibility in every nook and corner of the city. Despite their utility, they are often regarded as public nuisance as they deprive pedestrians of their space causing traffic jams and having links with the anti-social activities. Further unfriendly regulation and controls that govern their livelihoods make them vulnerable to extortions and harassment, Poor social protection and working conditions on the streets expose them to a variety of safety and health issues. Lots of work must be done to break the vicious cycle of poverty and improve their quality of life.

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Introduction :

A 'Street Vendor' is broadly defined 'as a person who offers goods for sale to the public without having a permanent built up structure from which to sell'. Street vendors may be **stationary** in the sense that they occupy space on the pavements or other public / private spaces or, they may be **mobile** in the sense they move from place to place carrying their wares on push carts or in baskets on their heads

Approximately, 2.5% of India's total population's sole source of existence is through street vending. They are mainly those who are unable to get regular jobs or have been retrenched from existing jobs and try to solve their problems by their own meager resources. According to one study, Mumbai has the largest number of street vendors numbering around 200,000, while Delhi has around 200,000, Calcutta has more than 191,000 and Ahmedabad has around 127,000. (www.Karmayog.org, 2011). With increasing urbanization, the number of street vendors in Patna has increased manifold. According to a study by Nidan , there are around 80,000 vendors and hawkers in Patna. Apart from serving the urban residents with cheap and fresh vegetables and other commodities they save time, money, physical harassment of the customers by being easy accessible in every nook and corner of the city. Despite their utility, they are often regarded as public nuisance and deprive pedestrians of their space causing traffic jams and having link with anti-social activities. Further, unfriendly regulations and controls that govern their livelihoods make them vulnerable to extortions and harassment. Poor social protection and working conditions on the streets expose them to a variety of safety and health issues.

Objective :

In the light of the above scenario, the present study is an humble attempt to investigate :

1. The socio-economic conditions of street vendors of Patna Municipal Corporation area as a part and parcel of informal sector.
2. Utility of street vendors.
3. Nuisance created by them.
4. How government and non-Governmental policy is helping to alleviate or depress their poverty.

Hypotheses :

1. Unemployment and poverty are responsible for increase in the size of street vendors.
2. Income of women vendors is lower than men.
3. Street vendors save a great deal of time, energy and money in procuring daily requirements of urban citizens.
4. Street vendors and hawkers are responsible for traffic jams in the city.

Study Area :

The study area is Patna Municipal Corporation area which is located at 25° 37'N latitude and 82° 12'E longitude. Patna, the capital city of Bihar, is situated on the southern levee of river Ganga backed by a curvilinear depression. It is the administrative, judicial and legislative focus of the state with various essential services. The total area of PMC is 57 sq. k.m. having a population of 14,42,992 (Census 2001), and is the largest city of the State. The PMC is divided into 72 wards which has been further re-grouped into three zones-West, central and East Patna in accordance with the three erstwhile assembly constituencies within the city boundaries.

Database :

The study is mainly based on primary data collected by random sample survey. Altogether 50 street vendors and 50 customers from three different zones of Patna have been covered. To know the differences of income of male and female

vendors, 25 male vendors and 25 female vendors have been covered. Apart from primary survey, the investigators have consulted relevant Government and non-Governmental data too.

Methodology :

The methodology of the study includes three stages: 1) **Pre-field Survey** which includes review of the concerned literature and collection of secondary data from various organizations, ii) **Field Survey** which includes primary data collection with the help of questionnaire schedule and iii) **Post field Survey** which includes compilation, tabulation and analysis of data, preparation of suitable diagram and the research paper.

Analysis :

The analysis of the data has been done both for objective and hypothesis. The street vendors of Patna are part and parcel of city life. From the sample survey, it can be said that majority of the sample street vendors (40%) belongs to scheduled caste community, 24% of them are from scheduled tribe community, and 28% of them are from other backward caste, while only 8% of them are from general community. 85% of them are followers of Hinduism while 12% of them are followers of Islamic religion and only 2% are followers of Christianity.

Demographic Composition of the sample population has been presented in table 1.

Table-1 : Demographic Composition of Street Vendors of Patna M.C.*

Year	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	Marr-ied	UM	Widow	Wido-wer	Sepa-rated
% of total	14	20	30	10	12	14	48	26	18	6	2

*Based on sample survey

Most of the girls from vendor families marry much before legal age at marriage. The average age at marriage of girls is 16 while the average age

at marriage of boys is just 21. The lower age at marriage has significant impact on their quality of life as it increases the size of the family and decreases per capita income of the family. About fifty percent of the sample vendors live in nuclear families, while 36% of them live in joint families and 14% of them live in extended families.

Reasons to become Street Vendors :

In most of the Indian cities the urban poor survive by working in the informal sector. Poverty and lack of gainful employment in the rural areas and in the smaller towns drive large numbers of people to the cities for work and livelihood. These people generally possess low skills and lack the level of education required for the better paid jobs in the organized sector. Besides, permanent protected jobs in the organized sector are shrinking. Hence even those having the requisite skills are unable to find proper employment. For these people working in the informal sector is the only means for their survival. This has led to a rapid growth of the informal sector in most of the larger cities. For the urban poor, vending is one of the means of earning a livelihood, as it requires minor financial input and the skills involved are low.

Table 2 shows the reasons to become street vendors in Patna Municipal Corporation area.

Table-2 : Reasons to become Street Vendors*

Reasons	Patna East	Patna Central	Patna West	Total
	%	%	%	%
Unemployment	43.75	61.11	43.75	50
Poverty	25	22.23	43.75	30
Family Business	31.25	11.11	12.5	18
Others	-	5.55	-	2
Total	100	100	100	100

*Based on sample survey

From table 2, it is clear that street vendors are mainly those who are unsuccessful or unable to get regular jobs. About 50% respondent became street vendors because of unemployment, followed by poverty (30%). Thus, it proves the first

hypothesis that **unemployment and poverty are the two major reasons for increasing the number of vendors in Patna**. It is clear that in all the three regions of Patna unemployment or no job is the predominant reason for becoming Street vendors especially in Patna Central.

Economic Conditions :

Street Vendors of Patna live in precarious conditions. Average monthly income of sample families is about Rs. four thousand three hundred only. Most of them are BPL families as average family income is considerably low. Average monthly incomes of male vendors are Rs. 4890 per month while average incomes of female vendors are Rs. 3712.00. The average income of sample vendors is lowest in Patna West while, it is highest in Patna Central followed by Patna East. (Table 3) The general flow of customers of Patna Central is more than the rest of the two surveyed areas and thus it enhances the average income of the vendors. Patna West, though more prosperous compared to other regions has more competitors to lower the income of street vendors. Moreover, women vendors of Patna West are mainly vegetable vendors with very low income level while male vendors of Patna West mainly sell garments and earn more compared to female vendors. Female vendors generally spend lesser time compared to male vendors as they have their household responsibility too. Further, male vendors generally invest more, vend various items like clothes, woolens etc., take more risks and are more rigorously involved in vending to enhance their income level. **Thus it proves the second hypothesis too.** But ironically the large size of the family lowers per capita income and makes life difficult for them.

Table - 3 : Average Income of Street Vendors of Patna M.C.*

Place	Average Income (in Rs/month)		Total (in Rs/month)
	Male	Female	
Patna East	4468.75	4250	4359.40
Patna Central	5444.40	4866.70	5155.50
Patna West	4687.50	1875	3281.20
Total (in Rs/month)	4890	3712	4301.00

*Based on Sample Survey

Illegal Tax Payment :

Hard work from morning till night, meager income and high rates of interest are not the only problems faced by street vendors in Patna. Illegal tax payment is also one of the problems faced by street vendors of PMC. The role played by the vendors in the economy as also in the society needs to be given due credit but they are considered as unlawful entities and are subjected to continuous harassment by Police and civic authorities. 26% of sample vendors of Patna M.C. area were vocal about illegal tax payment while the rest did not say anything about it. Probably, they were aware of their illegal status and therefore they are not interested in discussion about it. 31.25% of sample vendors of Patna Central are paying illegal tax while in Patna East, 25% of them are paying illegal tax while in Patna West 22.2% of them are paying illegal tax. The rest of them are not vocal about it but might be paying bribes in some form or the other.

Savings :

The meager income, expensive city life and high dependency ratio leaves little room for savings. The survey shows their negligible savings. Most of them keep their savings with themselves, while few have accounts in post-office. Interestingly, though the income of the vendors of Central Patna is more, their savings is least due to high dependency ratio.

Economic Crisis :

Economic crisis has a profound impact on the family budget of street vendors. Though they avoid debt, sometimes they have to take loan. Despite economic crisis 48% of them did not take loans, while the rest of them took loans either from relatives, friends or banks.

Health and Nutrition :

'Health is wealth'. From sample survey, it was clear that 58% of street vendors of Patna enjoy good health. Vendors of Central Patna enjoy better health (24.00%) than their counterparts in East and West Patna. 8% of the street vendors in Eastern Patna area and 4% in Western Patna enjoy satisfactory health. While 14% of street vendors in Central and Western Patna are suffering from various diseases and have reported poor health status. Higher cost of living in Western Patna especially exorbitant room rent leaves little scope for nutritious food. 40% of the street vendors are affected by diseases out of which 10% of street vendors of Patna are suffering from chronic cough, 30% are suffering from Asthma, 10% are suffering from hypertension 15% are suffering from Anaemia and 5% are suffering from Arthritis. Street vendors get to cure themselves by different means, from doctor's clinic, government hospital etc. 40% of the total surveyed vendors are dependent on medical shop for their treatment. Out of which 12% of vendors in western and Eastern Patna area and 16% of the street vendors of Central Patna are dependent on medical shop for treatment of their ailments without any doctor's consultation. 34.00% of street vendors of Patna go to the doctor's clinic which is a healthy sign while 26.00 % of the street vendors go to the government hospital where they get free treatment.

Food is the basic need of the human being and for keeping good health it is, the primary requirement. Affordability of Food and Nutrition

depends on the income level. Street vendors of Patna are mostly from poor background. Even then, with long stretch of working hours, they try to provide their families at least two square meals a day leave aside nutrition. Proper nutrition is must to keep oneself healthy and active. The survey finds that altogether 76% of vendors are getting proper nutrition, 12% of them are getting partial nutrition and 10% of them and mostly from BPL families are victim of malnutrition and impoverishment.

Education :

'Education' plays an important role in the socio-economic development of the country as well as individual. The process of educational attainment has an impact on all aspects of life. The level of education in the present generation determines the occupational level and consequent family life. Educational levels of vendors are extremely low. Though all of them are literate, one of the pre requisite to carry on vending job, 62% of sample vendors have reported about non-formal education, compared to 12% having primary level of education, 22% having middle level and 4% having secondary level of education.

Education of Children :

Education is very important for the growth of children but the children of the sample vendors suffer a lot. Their level of education is low. Most of the school going children of the vendor families are attending Hindi medium Government schools. Gender discrimination was clear from the sample survey. The children who are studying in English medium private schools are mostly male children while girls of the families are attending Hindi medium school. The trend is clear in all the three regions.

There are more drop out cases in Patna Central (23.52%), compared to 18.75 % in Patna East and 5.88% in Patna West. The drop out cases is mainly due to economic reasons which

compelled them to leave the studies and earn their livelihood.

Poverty is the main reason behind not attending school among vendors and their children. Even the parents are ready to send their children to schools, many children themselves are not interested in studies. Further poor economic conditions compel them to help their parents in their jobs. Thus most of the children do not attend schools and are deprived of the opportunity of social mobility through education.

Thus, from the sample survey of street vendors of Patna, it was clear that vendors are not well educated. The low level of education along with poverty compelled them to undertake street vending. Since most of them are from lower strata of the society, they cannot afford a paid staff. Family help is a must for majority of street vendors of Patna. Thus early entry of the children to family business hampers their education. The long working hour and high stress level leads to domestic violence and inferior status of female members of the family. Thus, with low educational attainment of parents and children, the street vendors are under vicious cycle of poverty struggling for their day to day survival.

Living Condition :

Decent housing has become a great problem for majority of the city dwellers. For city vendors, majority of who are from lower strata of the society, housing has become a great problem. Among sample vendors 10% are houseless population, 34% live in rented house while 56% live in own houses though mostly in low cost housing or slums. 50% of sample vendors living in Patna East have Pucca houses compared to 35.28% in Patna Central and 47.04% of people in Patna West. 11.76% people from Patna West live in semi pucca

house, where as 61.05% people of West Patna live in kutcha houses which is higher than their counterparts residing in other parts of the city. The exorbitant room rents and scarcity of houses in Patna West is primarily responsible for it.

For Pucca building materials they are using brick and cement, for semi Pucca they are using asbestos roof and brick wall while mud for kutcha houses. 62.50% of people living in Patna East have their own house, which is more than Patna Central and Patna West (52.92%).

64% of vendors of Patna people have water facility in their houses; where as 36% of people do not have water facility in their house. They get water from places like municipal taps, wells etc. Vendors of Patna East are lucky in this regard as 75% of them are fortunate enough to have drinking water facilities within premises compared to 53% in Patna West and 64% in Patna Central.

Electricity is another basic facility without which other basic services become impossible. All street vendors of Patna are not so fortunate enough to avail the facility of electricity. 50% of street vendors are forced to live in dark. Around 68.75% of vendors in Patna East can manage electricity facility, though some of them illegally compared to 41% in Patna West and Central.

Availability of toilet within premises is one such facility that has impact on the overall social environment of the household. Use of common and filthy toilet not only brings various diseases but also have a profound impact on the quality of life of the households. The facility of sanitation is unevenly distributed in Patna municipal area. Among sample population 68% have reported the existence of toilet within premises while 32% of them mainly from BPL families depend on outside toilet facilities. Vendors

of Patna East are lucky in this regard, where 75% of sample vendors have reported existence of toilet facilities within premises compared to 58.88% in Patna Central and 64.68% in Patna West. Availability of separate room for the household is one of the prime determining social environmental factors. Only 62% of sample households are having separate rooms of their own. 34% of them are sharing room with others while 4% of them are houseless population. 68.75% from east Patna, 64.68% from west Patna, 52.92% from central Patna have separate rooms. 41.16% street vendors from central Patna live in shared room and 11.1% of street vendors from central Patna have no room, they are forced to live on road side.

Roads are lifeline of any urban centre. Metalled roads devoid of bumps or water logging are definitely an enhancement of social environment of the locality. As most of them are residing in low cost slums, the approach roads towards their houses are not metalled ones. 50 % of sample vendors have reported about unmetalled approach roads with water logging during rainy season in contrary to other 50% who reported about existence of metalled road towards their houses. 75% of people from Patna East have metalled road facility in contrast to vendors of central and west Patna where 58.88% of street vendors don't have metalled road facility.

Apart from water logging and unmetalled approach road, another problem faced by vendors of Patna is heaps of garbage in the approach road. In some cases, they themselves are responsible for generation of large amount of solid waste in the main roads, but in their residential area and slums, they complained about existence of heaps of garbage in their locality.

Thus, it can be said that street vendors of Patna do not maintain high standard of social environment. As most of them belong to the lowest strata of the society, they cannot afford many basic amenities and are deprived of good quality of life.

Family Environment :

Status of women in most of the families is inferior to men. But the families where females are the sole bread winner, their status is equal to men.

Among sample households 40.00% in Patna Central women enjoy equal status like men in the families, but on the other hand 75% from Patna East, 65% from Patna West and 60% from Patna Central women are living in status far inferior to men. Conditions of women in these families are very poor and dismal.

The status of women in the family is also influenced by the fact whether she is facing any domestic violence or not. A violence and discrimination free family leads to better family life and healthy relationship among family members. But the survey showed despite several laws, domestic violence, either physical or mental, is still prevalent in our society. 76.44% women from West Patna, 70.56% from Central Patna and 56.25% from Patna East were suffering from it. The status of women in sample vendor families is not enviable at all.

Utility of Street Vendors :

Street vendors in India provide a vital link between the producer and the consumer, connecting the two in highly innovative, cost-efficient ways, keeping in view of regional specificities, as well as the varied requirements of people during different seasons, festivals and times of the day or night. Some of the utilities of street vendors are discussed below.

(a) Supplier of Street Food - 'Street food' is ready-to-eat food or drink sold in a street or other public place, such as a market or fair, often from a portable stall. It is one of the major attractions of streets for the youngsters. Street food costs less than a restaurant meal. According to one estimate, 2.5 billion people eat street food every day. Street food is intimately connected with fast food; it is distinguished by its local flavour and by being purchased on the street, without entering any building. Both take-out and fast food are often sold from counters inside buildings. In Patna, the evening streets are full with large number of food stalls and the students and commoners flock around these stalls to gain some energy and enjoy different kind of food.

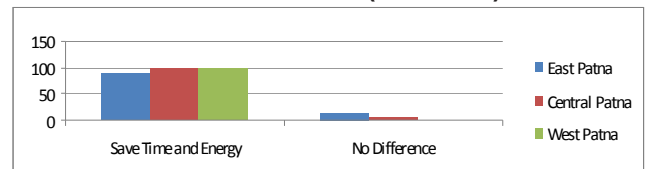
(b) Provides Cheap Commodities - The city vendors provide basic commodities at a cheap rate. The poorer sections too are able to procure their basic necessities through street vendors, which are cheap and affordable. In this way, one section of the urban poor is helping another section of the urban poor. By providing cheaper commodities, street vendors are in effect providing subsidy to the urban poor. 72% of the customers of Patna have agreed with this viewpoint while the rest 28% did not agree with this viewpoint.

The reason for such varied view point is mainly inflation and price rise of daily food items. The common men find it difficult to make both ends meet and find the items costly and beyond their budget.

(c) Saves Time and Energy - 'Time is money'. In modern days, with manifold increase in workload, the availability of vendors is a boon to city dwellers. They save considerable amount of time and energy, which could have been lost in their absence.

The trend is clear in the following figure. About 100% customers of Patna West and Patna Central agree with it, while about 80% of the customers of Patna East are ready to accept this fact. Thus, it proves the third hypothesis too.

PROCUREMENT OF DAILY ITEMS FROM VENDORS OF PATNA M.C.* (% of total)



* Based on Sample survey

Fig 1

(d) Supply quality Fruits and Vegetables - Vendors also help the customers to supply quality fruits and vegetables. Many morning walkers purchase fresh fruits and vegetables daily while coming back from their daily walk. But the quality of other items sold by vendors does not satisfy the customers though some of them compromise on the quality for the price.

(e) Generate confidence among passerby- The presence of vendors in the streets generates confidence among the passerby. The streets look deserted in the absence of vendors. That is why, the criminal activities and petty theft are more in the streets without vendors. The survey of the customers in all three areas confirms this fact. 70.56% people from Patna West, 64.68% people from Patna Central and 37.50% people from Patna East are in favour of it.

Thus, manifold utilities of vendors are clear from the above discussion. Right from supplying cheap and fresh vegetables at doorsteps to provide street foods, the vendors are catering manifold needs of the residents across different strata of the society.

Vendors as a Nuisance :

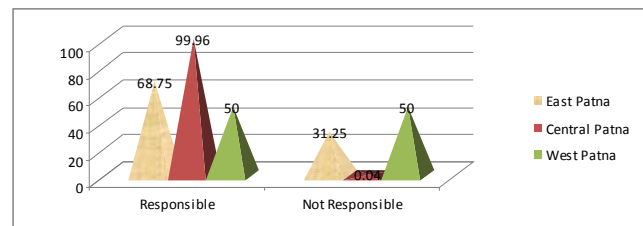
'Street Vendors have existed since time immemorial. In recent times, however, they have come to be regarded as public nuisance by certain sections of urban population. NGOs representing the elite section, especially the residents' associations in the middle section and Upper Middle Class are most vocal about eviction of street vendors from their vicinity. In most of the large cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, these associations aggressively argue for restoration of pavements as public space only when street vendors encroach them (Bhowmik, 2006).

Some of the nuisance created by vendors are discussed below.

(a) Generation of Solid waste - In cities the existence of street vendors, no doubt, is one of the reasons of generation of solid waste. From Food and vegetable peels to wrappers, plastic cups and plates, they are generating huge amount of solid waste every day. 78% of customers agreed about this view point too.

(b) Inconvenience and Traffic Jams - Elite NGOs always complain about inconvenience and traffic jams created by the vendors. This is clear from the following figure too. Customers of the Patna Central are more vocal about it compared to the other two areas. From figure 5, it is clear that **68.75% of customers in Patna West, 99.96% of customers of Central Patna and 50% of customers of Patna East agree with the fact that street vendors are responsible for Traffic jams and inconvenience of the urban residents.** This proves the fourth hypothesis too.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF VENDORS IN TRAFFIC JAMS OF PATNA M.C.* (% of total)



* Based on Sample survey

Fig 2

(c) Supply Unhygienic Food and spread the diseases- Concern regarding freshness often discourage people from eating street food. With the increasing pace of globalization and tourism, the safety of street food has become one of the major concerns of, and a focus for governments and scientists to raise public awareness. Even in Patna, many vendors supply unhygienic food and have become instrumental regarding various waterborne and food borne diseases.

Thus, the vendors deprive pedestrians of their space, cause inconvenience and become a source of traffic jam. Some vendors encourage antisocial activities also. Media also highlights the issue. The Municipal authorities too act promptly on their advice by evicting these vendors, depriving them of their livelihood.

Conclusion :

- Street vendors have proliferated in numbers and command a large proportion of the retail trade in India due to unemployment and poverty despite the development of shopping malls and giant retail outlets set-up by corporate sectors.
- They make up for their lack of big capital with long hours of work, innovative ways of displaying and stocking their goods and the use of family labour to provide the back-up support.

- They save a lot of time and energy, supply fresh vegetables to the city dwellers, supply cheap items to lower strata of the society, area source of food for students and other urban poor through street food system.
- They are one of the factors of the city traffic jams, some of them are related to anti-social elements but without them, the city life will be drab and difficult.
- Eviction of vendors means unemployment, social unrest and enhancement of criminal activities.

Suggestions :

- The street vendors should be treated as human beings.
- Police and civic authorities are ready to evict them in the name of beautification and security of the city. But this needs to be done after making alternative arrangements for them.
- Recognition of vending as a profession is a must for the overall development of this urban informal sector.
- Formulation of urban plan to demarcate public spaces for vending like Delhi Hat, development and regulation of natural markets in urban areas, construction of semi-permanent structures, will ease out traffic problems as well as provide social security to the vendors.
- To provide social security to this segment of population group insurance schemes for them, nurture and educate their children will improve their quality of life.
- Training of vendors regarding maintaining hygiene to prepare food will solve the food problems of urban poor as it is cheap and easily affordable.
- To solve their problems and also get their services, a meaningful dialogue between civic authorities, shopkeepers, resident associations and vendors are required.

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